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QUESTION OF EAST TIMOR

SECURITY COUNCIL
Forty-second year

Letter dated 1 July 1987 from the Permanent Representative of Indonesia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to refer to the note verbale dated 23 June 1987 from the Permanent Representative of Mozambique conveying two "documents" on the Indonesian elections for circulation as an official document of the General Assembly and of the Security Council (A/42/362-S/18944).

We continue to be somewhat perplexed at the proclivity of the Permanent Representative of Mozambique to indulge in the dissemination of newspaper and other reports of dubious veracity and value with the obvious intent to besmirch Indonesia's international reputation and in the vain hope of influencing the views of other Member States on a certain issue. Invariably, these efforts have been timed to coincide with the meetings of certain United Nations bodies and committees, and, true to form, the main "document" quoted, purportedly written by a "London-based specialist on Indonesia and East Timor", remains anonymous and unidentified.

To respond to such gratuitous presentations would only lend dignity to them. However, some of the more glaring misrepresentations and insinuations contained in the two "documents" in question are such as to compel us to make the following brief comments:

1. The evolution of Indonesia's political party system, from the profusion of 40 plus parties in the 1950s to 10 in the early 1960s and now reduced to 3 has been a process reflective of the conscious realization of all political forces in Indonesia of the need to rationalize the country's political party

* A/42/50.

system if we were to make concrete progress in nation-building and national development and put an end to the political bickering, instability and waste of resources that have characterized earlier periods of our history. Under the New Order Government, the decision to reduce Indonesia's political parties to three (the GOLKAR or Functional Group, the United Development Party or PPP and the Indonesian Democratic Party or PDI) through fusion or merger of like-minded parties was a decision based on national consensus and the full support of all existing parties at that time. Hence, there is no question of such a development or decision being "government-enforced". And the political stability and economic progress which Indonesia has achieved for the past 20 years fully bear out the wisdom of that decision.

2. If one is to speak of the historical roots or contemporary relevance of the political parties indigenous to East Timor, then objectively these can only be seen in the limited context of their aim to move from the stage of dependency to the exercise of self-determination. Thus, after East Timor acceded to independence through integration into the Republic of Indonesia, these political parties, having fulfilled their specific raison d'etre, as a matter of course integrated themselves into the larger political party system of the Republic. Incidentally, the same development occurred with regard to the People's Assembly, which was convened in July 1976 to formally petition the Indonesian Government for integration. Having fulfilled its specific role, this Assembly too dissolved itself, but many of its members continued their political activities and assumed various elective offices, as for example, Mr. Mario Viegas Carrascalao who is the present Governor of East Timor. Hence, to argue that the present Indonesian political parties have no historical roots or contemporary relevance to the people of East Timor is contextually wholly beside the point.

3. Under the present laws, and again reflective of a national consensus decision, members of Indonesia's armed forces do not have the right to participate in general elections, in other words, to elect or be elected to the various legislative bodies of the country. Being recognized, however, as one of the nation's social forces which has actually contributed to Indonesia's national struggle for independence and hence, having the legitimate aspiration to contribute to the nation's further development, the armed forces, in return, are given the right directly to appoint their representatives in these legislative bodies, up to an agreed proportion of total membership.

We know that this authentically Indonesian political compact has often given rise to misunderstandings or even deliberate misrepresentations especially by certain sections of the Western media and public opinion, which are inclined to mask their ignorance or bigotry by simplistically depicting it as being a "military-dominated" structure. Be that as it may, it is precisely because we have been able to forge national consensus on this issue that the turmoil and instability which has plagued Indonesia's earlier political life and which, indeed, still aflict many other countries of the developing world until this very day, has been put to rest. The Indonesian people, therefore, will continue to develop this particular feature of its political system into

a harmonious civilian-armed forces partnership, in the full confidence that in time the international community will come to appreciate its relevancy and viability, in particular for a great number of the newly independent countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America.

4. The PDI has not, as alleged, "changed in character after it was rescued from extinction by a group of generals who selected its leadership". When in 1986, this party was caught in a rather long drawn-out internal squabble in the process of electing a new leadership, the Indonesian Interior Minister, in accordance with the law, offered to mediate and contribute to a solution. The subsequent decision to appoint a rejuvenated party leadership was one taken entirely by the party rank-and-file themselves, and indeed this decision and the apparent appeal of this leadership towards Indonesia's large youthful electorate are among the factors that can be ascribed to PDI's greatly improved showing in the polls. Thus, to insinuate that the PDI "is now a party with the political backing of the armed forces commander-in-chief, General Murdani ..." is as far-fetched as it is ludicrous.

5. The Indonesian Government has never asserted that "the 1987 elections are the third to have been held in East Timor", as in fact general (national) elections, as such, have been conducted in East Timor only once before, in 1982. What several Indonesian political personalities have said is that with the 1987 elections it was the third time that the people of East Timor have had the occasion to democratically express their will to be united with Indonesia, having declared, for the first time, their determination to be independent through integration with Indonesia on 17 July 1976.

And, indeed, can it be denied that by participating freely in these elections the people of East Timor have reconfirmed, directly or indirectly, their desire to live in freedom and in unity with the rest of the Indonesian people and to engage themselves freely in the political, economic and cultural life of Indonesia? If there has been any prevalent wish to the contrary, it could have been expressed in various ways, inter alia, by boycotting or otherwise sabotaging the elections. The enthusiastic turn-out of eligible voters, the negligible incidence of invalid ballots, and the peaceful process of the voting itself all point to a resounding confirmation of the true wishes of the people.

6. In the "documents" submitted, a consistent effort can be discerned to portray the Indonesian elections, especially in East Timor, as having been "rigged" or otherwise "manipulated". For example, reference is made to "a special system of casting votes" in East Timor.

On account of the uneven literacy level of the Indonesian electorate, the system of casting votes has been designed in a simplified manner, obviating the need for voters to fill out complicated forms. Instead, voters can indicate their preference by either piercing the election symbol of the political party of their choice on their ballot paper and placing it in a single ballot box, or by putting their ballot paper (unpierced) into one of

the three party boxes, thus indicating their choice. The latter system was applied in East Timor.

Since under either method, both the act of piercing the ballot paper or of putting it into the appropriate box proceed in the privacy of the polling booth, it is clear that the principle of free and secret elections is fully maintained. Thus, there is no ground whatsoever to allege that under the second method "the scope for abuse is ... immeasurably greater".

7. Neither does the contention that a vote for GOLKAR would signify support for integration, or vice-versa, hold any validity. All three political parties in Indonesia are fully supportive of East Timor's integration and of the Government's policies with regard to this province. To suggest, therefore, that votes had to be manipulated in such a way as to show overwhelming support for GOLKAR in East Timor and, hence, support for integration does not make any sense at all.

8. Much has been made of the fact that in some electoral districts and provinces there has been an excess in the number of votes actually cast as compared to the number of registered voters. The logical explanation for this has been given on several occasions by the competent election officials, including the Interior Minister of Indonesia. As in most other countries, provision is made in Indonesia's election system for so-called absentee-voters, i.e. people who on election day are away from their original voting district, on business or for whatever other reason. These people are issued absentee voting ballots (so-called AB-ballots) and are allowed to cast their vote at the polling station where they happen to be at that time. It is this category of votes that account for an excess in numbers in certain districts. However, since voting procedures are based on a meticulous system of personal identifiction and elaborate pre-registration requirements, absentee voters (AB-ballot holders) names are automatically expunged from the voter-lists in their original districts, so as to foreclose any possibility of double-voting. Thus, nation-wide and in the aggregate, there is no difference in the total number of votes cast. We are quite mystified, therefore, to read the rather confused excerpts of a report purportedly written by the BBC Jakarta correspondent as contained in annex II and we wonder how he could ever have arrived at such fantastic figures without having access to the precise voting lists of the thousands of Indonesia's polling districts.

In summary, I would like to state that Indonesia indeed possesses a unique political system that is neither an imitation of Western-type democrary nor of the people's democracy variant but one consciously adapted and suited to the nation's own identity, history and cultural legacy. We take pride in this and we shall not be deterred from pursuing this authentic path of nation-building and national development despite the constant misrepresentations, insinuations and innuendo by Indonesia's detractors and by those quarters in the international media and public opinion that are loath to accept the right of every nation to develop its own social and ecnomic system. We do note with sincere regret, however, the apparent identification of the Permanent Representative of Mozambique with these inherently negative and prejudiced views on Indonesia and we wonder whether he would be as

eager in embracing those views when these very same quarters engage in analysing the political conditions and developments in Mozambique.

Finally, I shall be grateful, if you would kindly arrange for this letter to be circulated as an official document of the General Assembly, under item 114 of the preliminary list, and of the Security Council.

(Signed) Ali ALATAS
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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